

10

HELTER SKELTER IN A SUMMER SWELTER RETURN OF THE DEATH LIST

“Everybody was experimenting and taking it all the way. It opened up a negative force of energy that was almost demonic.” Frank Mazolla, editor of the film Performance

IT IS NOW, SAD TO SAY, TIME TO ADD SOME MORE NAMES TO THE EVER-growing Laurel Canyon Death List. The first new name is Mr. Brian Jones of the Rolling Stones, who purportedly drowned without assistance in his home swimming pool on July 3, 1969, at the age of twenty-seven. (Jim Morrison would allegedly die precisely two years later, also at the age of twenty-seven.) Just three days after Jones' tragic death, the Stones, with the Hell's Angels providing security, played a previously scheduled concert in Hyde Park, footage of which appears in Kenneth Anger's *Invocation of My Demon Brother*. Despite being the founder of the Stones and being widely regarded as the main creative force within the band, Jones had been unceremoniously dumped by the group on June 9, less than a month before his death. He was replaced just four days later by Mick Taylor, who in turn was later replaced by Ron Wood. It would later be claimed that Jones was booted from the band due to his chronic substance abuse problems, although Keith Richards' legen-

dary drug intake never seemed to pose a problem for the group.

The Rolling Stones were not, to be sure, a Laurel Canyon band, but they did spend a considerable amount of time there and they were very closely tied to the scene. As Barney Hoskyns writes in *Hotel California*, “In the summer of 1968 the English band was flirting heavily with Satanism and the occult... and spending a lot of time in Los Angeles.” A lot of time, that is, in and around Laurel Canyon—and during that time, Mick Jagger was involved in two occult-drenched, Crowley-influenced film projects, Kenneth Anger’s *Lucifer Rising* and Donald Cammell’s *Performance*.

Jagger was the first musical superstar tapped by Anger to compose a soundtrack for his *Lucifer Rising* project, which at the time was to star Mansonite Bobby Beausoleil. Anger would later solicit a soundtrack for the long-delayed film project from Led Zeppelin’s Jimmy Page, the proud owner of one of the world’s largest collections of Aleister Crowley memorabilia, including Crowley’s notorious Boleskine estate on the shores of Scotland’s Loch Ness. When ultimately released, however, the film featured a soundtrack by neither Jagger nor Page, but rather one that was composed, recorded and arranged inside a prison cell by convicted murderer Bobby Beausoleil. The footage that Anger had shot of Beausoleil, meanwhile, ended up in a different film, the aforementioned *Invocation of My Demon Brother*. Costarring in *Lucifer Rising*, as Osiris, was *Performance* writer and co-director Donald Seaton Cammell, who happened to be a good friend of Roman Polanski.

Cammell, who some described as a master manipulator, was the son of Charles Richard Cammell, who happened to be a close friend and biographer of notorious occultist Aleister Crowley. Donald himself was, or at least claimed to be, Crowley’s godson. Cammell’s decidedly Crowleyian film was originally to star his good friend Marlon Brando, but the role ultimately went to actor James Fox. Brando and Cammell did, however, find time to write a novel together.

Speaking of Brando, he somehow found himself at the center of a curious string of deaths that began on May 16, 1990, when Marlon’s son Christian gunned down Dag Drollet, the father of his sister Cheyenne’s unborn child, in Marlon’s Laurel Canyon-adjacent home. Though convicted, Christian got off with a rather light sentence, thanks primarily to Marlon having had his own daughter, the prosecution’s poten-

tial star witness, locked away in a mental institution in Tahiti, safe from subpoena. A few years later, on April 14, 1995, twenty-five-year-old Cheyenne was found swinging from the end of a rope, her death unsurprisingly ruled a suicide. The next year, Christian Brando was released from prison and promptly became involved with a woman by the name of Bonnie Lee Bakley, who caught a bullet to the head on May 4, 2001, while in the company of new hubby Robert Blake (her tenth husband). Marlon dropped dead next, on July 1, 2004, though his death wasn't particularly shocking given that he was getting on in years. His home was promptly purchased by good friend and neighbor Jack Nicholson, who immediately announced plans to bulldoze it, declaring the structure to be decrepit. He never did though explain why a man wealthy enough to own his own Polynesian island was purportedly living in a derelict home. A few years later, on January 26 of 2008, Christian Brando dropped dead at the relatively young age of forty-nine.

Returning now, after that brief digression, to our discussion of Donald Cammell's *Performance*, we find that Mick Jagger was cast to play the role of 'Turner,' a debauched rock star (which, obviously, was a real stretch for Mick). James Fox played 'Chas,' a violent organized-crime figure. He was trained for the role by David Litvinoff, a real-life crime figure and associate of the notoriously sadistic Kray brothers. Litvinoff reportedly sent Fox to the south of London for a couple of months to hang out with his gangster buddies; when he returned, according to various accounts, Fox had literally *become* the violent character he portrayed in the film. After completing work on the project, Fox reportedly suffered a massive nervous breakdown, suspended his acting career and withdrew from public view for over a decade.

Recruited to create the film's soundtrack was Bernard Alfred "Jack" Nitzsche, an occultist and the son of a supposed 'medium.' Nitzsche, along with Sonny Bono, had begun his music career as a lieutenant for gun-brandishing producer Phil Spector (Nitzsche was one of the architects of Spector's famed "wall of sound"). Nitzsche was also a familiar presence on the Laurel Canyon scene, collaborating with such noted bands and artists as Buffalo Springfield, Neil Young, Randy Newman, Michelle Phillips, the Turtles, Captain Beefheart, Carole King, David Blue, Ricky Nelson and Tim Buckley.

Nitzsche's *Performance* soundtrack was composed, according to au-

thor Michael Walker, "in a witch's cottage in the canyon." (I'm not exactly sure what a "witch's cottage" is, but it's nice to know that Laurel Canyon had one.) One of the musicians hired by Nitzsche to play on that soundtrack was Lowell George, who we will also be adding to the Laurel Canyon Death List. For now, let's add Donald Cammell to the list, since on April 24, 1996, he became yet another of the characters in this story to catch a bullet to the head, and yet another to allegedly die by his own hand. David Litvinoff, *Performance*'s Director of Authenticity, reportedly also committed suicide. Nitzsche died of a heart attack on August 25, 2000. A few years earlier, he had made an appearance on primetime television—as a gun-brandishing drunkard arrested on the streets of Hollywood on *Cops*.

The next name on the Death List is Steve Brandt, who was a close friend of both John Phillips and one of the victims at 10050 Cielo Drive. Brandt allegedly overdosed on barbiturates in late November of 1969, some three-and-a-half months after the Manson murders. In the days and weeks following those murders, Brandt had placed numerous phone calls to the LAPD. Those calls became increasingly frantic in nature, and Brandt became increasingly fearful that his own life might be in jeopardy. He soon decided to put some distance between himself and LA, so he headed for New York City. On the night of his death, according to Phillips' autobiography, Brandt attended a Rolling Stones concert at Madison Square Garden, where he attempted to run on stage but was repelled and beaten by a security guard. He then went home and, according to official mythology, overdosed.

It seems obvious that if someone had information that desperately needed to be made public, and if it was the kind of information that authorities had, say, willfully failed to act upon, and if the information was of the type that could not be taken to the mainstream media, and if the year was 1969 and the mass communication technology that we now take for granted did not yet exist, then grabbing the mic at a Stones concert at Madison Square Garden might just be one of the most effective means of disseminating that information. Brandt failed in what may have been an attempt to do just that, and he turned up dead just hours later.

Next up is David Blue, another of the forgotten talents of Laurel Canyon. Blue was born Stuart David Cohen on February 18, 1941; shortly

thereafter, his father was deployed overseas. According to David, his dad “came hobbling home on crutches and stayed depressed all his life” (not unlike, it seems fair to say, the family situation of our old friend Phil Ochs). David and his slightly older half-sister, Suzanne, endured a hellish existence consisting of alternating periods of rages and silences. Suzanne got out first, only to end up busted for prostitution in New York City in 1963. Suzanne’s next stop, just a few months later, was at the county morgue.

David, meanwhile, had gotten out of the house as well, by dropping out of school and joining the US Navy at the age of seventeen—just as Lenny Bruce had done. And, like Jimi Hendrix, Blue was purportedly booted out of the service, after which he decided to become a folk singer. His first album was released in 1966. A later effort was produced by Graham Nash, who also, as previously noted, produced a record for the forgotten talent Judee Sill, with whom Blue had much in common. Like Sill, David Blue was one of the Laurel Canyon stars who never quite shone as brightly as they should have. And also like Sill, Blue was one of the first few acts signed by David Geffen’s fledgling Asylum label. Finally, as with Judee, David was long forgotten by the time of his death, on December 2, 1982, when the forty-one-year-old Blue dropped dead while jogging in New York’s Washington Square Park. The former rising star (and occasional actor) lay in the morgue for three days before anyone noticed that he was missing.

Next on the list is Ricky Nelson, who—like Brandon DeWilde, Kenneth Anger, Mickey Dolenz and Van Dyke Parks—began his Hollywood career as a child actor. He was the son, as everyone surely knows, of America’s favorite 1950s TV mom and dad, Ozzie and Harriet Nelson. Ricky began his rock’n’roll career in 1957, when he was just seventeen. By 1962, he had scored no fewer than thirty top forty hits, trailing only superstars Elvis Presley and Pat Boone.

Speaking of Elvis, he arrived in LA in 1956 to begin what would prove to be a prolific film career that would continue throughout the 1960s and would result in the inexcusable creation of nearly three dozen motion pictures. In the early years of his film career, Elvis reportedly spent his off-hours hanging out with his two best Hollywood pals—a couple of young roommates and Canyonites named Dennis Hopper and Nick Adams. In later years, Presley’s backing musicians—considered to be

among the best session musicians in the business—were in high demand among the Laurel Canyon crowd. Elvis' bass player, for example, can be heard on some of the Doors' tracks. The entire band was recruited by "Papa" John Phillips to play on his less-than-memorable solo project. Mike Nesmith's critically acclaimed post-Monkees project, the First National Band, featured Presley's band as well. Gram Parsons also hired Elvis' band to back him up on the two solo albums he recorded at what proved to be the twilight of his life and career.

Those two solo efforts by Parsons, by the way, prominently featured the voice of a young singer/guitarist named Emmylou Harris, a relatively late arrival to the canyon scene. Harris was the daughter—brace yourselves here for a real shocker, folks—of a career US Marine Corps officer. As with so many other characters in this story, she grew up in the outlying suburbs of Washington, DC, primarily in Woodbridge, Virginia—which happens to be the home of an impossibly large Army research and development installation known as the Harry Diamond Laboratories Woodbridge Research Facility.

In 1972, during the time that Parsons and Harris were recording and performing together, columnist Jack Anderson revealed that, "Experiments to control human behavior with science fiction devices are being conducted secretly at the Army's high-fenced Harry Diamond Laboratories in Washington... Ultimately, human guinea pigs will be used to test the devices. Although a classified memorandum in our hands specifies the tests are for riot and civil disturbance control, the memo admits the general purpose is 'short-time-span control of human behavior.'" It sounds as though Emmylou Harris probably fit right in with the rest of the Laurel Canyon crowd.

But here I seem to have digressed from our discussion of Elvis, which was, if I remember correctly, itself a digression from our discussion of Ricky Nelson. Given though that he had only peripheral connections to Laurel Canyon, I guess I don't really have much more to say about Elvis other than that he reportedly died on August 16, 1977, the victim of a drug overdose at the young age of forty-two. As with Morrison, however, there have been persistent rumors that Elvis didn't actually die at all, but rather reinvented himself to escape from the fishbowl. Also as with Morrison, Elvis apparently had a keen interest in the occult, particularly the writings of Madame Blavatsky.

WEIRD SCENES INSIDE THE CANYON

As for Nelson, in the mid-1960s he successfully shed his ‘teen idol’ image and emerged as a respected pioneer of the country-rock wave that Canyonites Jackson Browne, Linda Ronstadt and the Eagles would soon ride to dizzying heights of commercial success. One future member of the Eagles, Randy Meisner, played in Nelson’s Stone Canyon Band. As the name of the band would seem to imply, Nelson had moved to one of the many neighboring canyons, but he had previously lived on Mt. Olympus in Laurel Canyon and he and his band were very much a part of the early country-rock scene that included bands like the Byrds, Poco, the Flying Burrito Brothers and the First National Band.

Nelson was killed on New Year’s Eve, 1985, in a rather unusual plane crash. According to Nelson’s Wikipedia entry, “the original NTSB investigation long ago stated that the crash was probably due to mechanical problems. The pilots attempted to land in a field after smoke filled the cabin. An examination indicated that a fire originated in the right hand side of the aft cabin area at or near the floor line. The passengers were killed when the aircraft struck obstacles during the forced landing; the pilots were able to escape through the cockpit windows and survived.” Nothing unusual about that, I suppose. Shit happens.

For the final eight years of his life, Nelson lived in a rather unique home. In 1941, swashbuckling actor Errol Flynn had purchased an eleven-and-a-half-acre chunk of the Hollywood Hills just off Mulholland Drive and had a sprawling home built to his specifications. According to Laurie Jacobson and Marc Wanamaker, writing in *Haunted Hollywood*, the mansion featured “several mysterious secret passageways, and more than a few peepholes.” The home appeared to have been designed to allow for surreptitious observation of guests in the home’s numerous bedrooms. It is claimed that Flynn incorporated the unusual design features so that he could satisfy his own voyeuristic impulses. Researcher/writer Charles Higham, however, has cast Flynn as a Western intelligence asset, and if true, then it is far more likely that the home was built not so much for Flynn’s personal pleasure but rather as a means of compromising prominent public figures.

After Nelson’s death, the palatial home stood vacant until a curious incident took place; referring once again to Jacobson and Wanamaker, we find that “A gang broke in and murdered a girl in the living room. Then a mysterious fire burned half the house. The ruins were torn

down.” Like I said, shit happens.

Moving on to the next name on the list, we find that on December 31, 1943—precisely forty-two years before the plane crash that would claim the life of Ricky Nelson—Henry John Deutschendorf, Jr., better known as John Denver, was born in Roswell, New Mexico. A few years later, the town of Roswell would make a name for itself and become something of a tourist destination. But that is not really the focus here, though it should be noted that Henry John Deutschendorf, Sr. might well have known a little something about that incident, given that he was a career US Air Force officer assigned to the Roswell Army Air Field (later renamed the Walker Air Force Base), which was likely the origin of the object that famously crashed in Roswell.

After spending his childhood being frequently uprooted, as did many of our cast of characters, Denver attended Texas Tech University in the early 1960s. In 1964, he apparently heard the call of the Pied Piper and promptly dropped out of school and headed for LA. Once there, he joined up with the Chad Mitchell Trio, the group from which Jim McGuinn had recently departed to co-found the Byrds. By November 1966, Denver was front-and-center at the so-called ‘Riot on the Sunset Strip,’ alongside folks like Peter Fonda, Sal Mineo and a popular husband-and-wife duo known as Sonny and Cher.

A decade later, in the latter half of the 1970s, Denver could be found working alongside a spooky chap by the name of Werner Erhard, creator of so-called ‘EST’ training. After graduating from the training program, Denver penned a little ditty that became the organization’s theme song. In 1985, Denver testified alongside our old friend Frank Zappa at the PMRC hearings. Twelve years later, in autumn of 1997, Denver died when his self-piloted plane crashed soon after taking off from Monterey Airport, very near where the Monterey Pop Festival had been held thirty years earlier. The date of the crash, curiously enough, was one that we have stumbled across before: October 12.

The next name we need to add to the list is one that has already worked its way into this narrative a time or two, Sonny Bono. As previously noted, Bono began his Hollywood career as a lieutenant for reclusive murderer Phil Spector. In the early 1960s, Bono hooked up with an underage Cherilyn Sarkisian LaPierre to form a duo known first as Caesar and Cleo, and then as Sonny and Cher. The pair were phenom-

WEIRD SCENES INSIDE THE CANYON

enally successful, first on the Sunset Strip and later on television. Bono, of course, ultimately gave up the Hollywood life and found work in a different branch of the federal government: the US House of Representatives.

On January 5, 1998, Sonny Bono died after purportedly skiing into a tree. At the time, he occupied a seat on the House Judiciary Committee, which was about to come to sudden prominence with the investigation and impeachment of President Clinton. The ball was already rolling by the time of Bono's death, and on January 26, 1998, just three weeks after the alleged skiing incident, Clinton held his now-notorious press conference. By that time, Bono's seat on the panel had been set aside for his robowife.

Let's turn our attention now to Phil Hartman, the *Saturday Night Live* alumnus who was murdered in his Encino home on May 28, 1998. That much is not in dispute. Decidedly less clear is the answer to the question of who it was that actually shot and killed Hartman. The official story holds that it was his wife Brynn, who shortly thereafter shot herself—with a different gun, naturally, and reportedly after she had left the house and then returned with a friend, and *after* the LAPD had arrived at the home. There is a very strong possibility, however, that both Phil and his wife were murdered, with the true motive for the crime covered up by trotting out the tired but ever-popular murder/suicide scenario.

In most people's minds, of course, Phil Hartman is not associated with the Laurel Canyon scene of the late 1960s and early 1970s. But as it turns out, Hartman did indeed have substantial ties to that scene. To begin with, during the time that Jimi Hendrix lived in LA (in the spacious mansion just north of the Log Cabin on Laurel Canyon Boulevard), Hartman worked for him as a roadie. Soon after that, Phil found work as a graphic artist and he quickly found himself much in demand by the Laurel Canyon rock royalty. In addition to designing album covers for both Poco and America, Hartman also designed a readily recognizable rock symbol that has endured for over forty years: the distinctive CSN logo for Crosby, Stills & Nash.

Hartman was also the brother of record executive/club proprietor John Hartmann, who was an associate of David Geffen. Hartmann had begun his career as a protégé of Elvis handler Colonel Tom Parker, who,

in the 1940s, had worked with cowboy actor/Log Cabin owner Tom Mix. And Tom Mix, in turn, had frequently used the Spahn Movie Ranch as a filming location. That same ranch later became the home of Charles Manson and his girls, including Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme, who happened to have been a high school chum of Phil Hartman. Curiously enough, the Log Cabin's guesthouse, also known as the Bird House, was designed and built by architect Robert Byrd, who also, according to one report, designed the house at 10050 Cielo Drive where Sharon Tate and friends were murdered, *and* the house at 5065 Encino Avenue where Phil Hartman was murdered.

Phil Hartman was not the only Laurel Canyon luminary who had past school ties to Squeaky Fromme; Mark Volman, co-lead vocalist for the Turtles, knew Ms. Fromme from their days together in Westchester where they attended Orville Wright Junior High School.

During the days of the Manson clan's stay at the now infamous Spahn Ranch, there was a similarly dilapidated movie set that was located right across the road. Its name, being the small world that it is, was the Wonderland Movie Ranch. Speaking of Wonderland, let's turn our attention next to four individuals whose names will probably not be familiar to most readers: Ronald Launius, Billy Deverell, Barbara Richardson and Joy Miller. All died on July 1, 1981, all by bludgeoning, and all at the same location: 8763 Wonderland Avenue in Laurel Canyon. All were members of a gang that trafficked heavily in cocaine and occasionally in heroin.

The leader of the group was Ron Launius, who reportedly embarked on his criminal career, and established his drug connections, while serving for Uncle Sam over in Vietnam, which is also where he began to build his carefully crafted reputation as a merciless, cold-blooded killer. At the time that he became a murder victim himself, Launius was a suspect in no fewer than twenty-seven open homicide investigations. He was also a drug supplier to various members of the Laurel Canyon aristocracy, including Chuck Negron of Three Dog Night.

Victim Billy Deverell was Launius' second-in-command, and victim Joy Miller was Billy's girlfriend as well as the renter of the Laurel Canyon drug den. Victim Barbara Richardson was the girlfriend of another member of the gang, David Lind, who conveniently was not at the home at the time of the mass murder. That could well have been due to the

fact that Lind was, according to various rival drug dealers, a police informant for both the Sacramento and Los Angeles Police Departments. He was also a member of the ultra-violent prison gang known as the Aryan Brotherhood (as is, by several accounts, Bobby Beausoleil). Lind, who met Launius when the two had served time together, is alleged to have overdosed in 1995, though it is widely believed that he actually went into the federal witness protection program.

A year-and-a-half earlier, another drug dealer with close connections to the music scene was brutally murdered in his Laurel Canyon home, though his death was dismissed by the LAPD as a suicide. Lawrence Eugene "Larry" Williams was a singer, songwriter, musician, producer and actor born on May 10, 1935, in New Orleans, Louisiana. He achieved some success in the late 1950s as a solo artist before being convicted and sent to prison on drug dealing charges in 1960. Following a three-year prison stint, he returned to the music business, working frequently with longtime friend Little Richard. He also continued to spend a good deal of time in the violent world of drug trafficking and prostitution.

Williams had no shortage of fans among the Laurel Canyon and British Invasion bands. The Beatles scored a hit with his *Dizzy Miss Lizzy* and the Rolling Stones covered his *She Said Yeah*. In the late 1960s and the early 1970s, Williams also tried his hand at acting, including a co-starring role alongside O.J. Simpson in 1974's *The Klansman*. He failed to achieve significant success in the entertainment business; his lavish lifestyle, however, indicated that he did very well for himself as a pimp and drug trafficker.

On January 7, 1980, Williams was found dead in his Laurel Canyon home with a gunshot wound to his head and his blood splattered all over his garage walls. Though ruled a suicide, no one who was familiar with Larry's violent lifestyle was much convinced of that. In a bizarre turn of events, another blues singer named Martin Allbritton appropriated his name before Williams' body was even cold. He continues to this day to claim that he is the real Larry Williams and even tours and performs under the name "Big" Larry Williams.

The next name on the list is Brian Cole, bass player for the Association, a Laurel Canyon folk-rock band known for the hit songs *Along Comes Mary* and *Never My Love*. The Association was formed by Terry Kirkman and Jules Alexander; Kirkman had formerly played in a band

DAVID MCGOWAN

with Frank Zappa, while Alexander was fresh from a stint in the US Navy. Jerry Yester, a guitarist and keyboardist with the band, was formerly with the Modern Folk Quartet, a band managed by Zappa manager Herb Cohen and produced by Byrds manager Jim Dickson. Guitarist Larry Ramos had formerly been with the New Christy Minstrels, which also produced Gene Clark of the Byrds.

On June 16, 1967, Cole and his band were the first to take the stage at the Monterey Pop Festival, followed by such Laurel Canyon stalwarts as the Byrds, Buffalo Springfield, and the Mamas and the Papas. Five years later, on August 2, 1972, Cole was found dead in his Los Angeles home. The cause of death was reportedly a heroin overdose. Cole was one month shy of his thirtieth birthday at the time of his death.

Another new name on the Laurel Canyon Death List is Lowell George, the founder and creative force behind the critically acclaimed but largely obscure band known as Little Feat. George was the son of Willard H. George, a famous furrier to the Hollywood movie studios. Lowell's first foray into the music world was with a band known as the Factory, which cut some demos with a guy by the name of Frank Zappa. The Factory evolved into the Fraternity of Man, though without George, who had left to serve as lead vocalist for the Standells. George returned, however, to join the band in the studio for the recording of their second album. By that time, as we have already learned, the Fraternity of Man had taken up residence in the Log Cabin, alongside Carl Franzoni and his fellow freaks.

George next joined up with Frank Zappa's Mothers of Invention, though his tenure there was destined to be a short one; like so many others, Lowell left embittered by Zappa's dictatorial approach to making music and his condescending treatment of his bandmates. After parting company with Zappa, George formed Little Feat, a band composed mostly of musicians from the Fraternity of Man sessions. Lowell, who is credited with being a pioneer of the use of slide guitar in rock music, served as singer, songwriter and lead guitarist for the band, which released its debut album in 1970. Though well regarded within the industry and by critics, the band's albums failed to sell and George ultimately announced the demise of the band and recorded a solo album. After playing a show on June 29, 1979, at George Washington University in support of that album, George was found dead in an Arlington, Virginia,

WEIRD SCENES INSIDE THE CANYON

hotel room, very near the Pentagon. Cause of death was said to be a massive heart attack, though George was just thirty-four years old at the time.

According to Barney Hoskyns, writing in *Hotel California*, “A regular social stop-off for George was a Laurel Canyon house on Wonderland Avenue belonging to Three Dog Night singer Danny Hutton. A drop-in den of debauchery, the Hutton house featured a bedroom with black walls and a giant fireplace. Lowell would often swing by and entertain the likes of Brian Wilson or Harry Nilsson.” Nilsson and his regular drinking buddy, John Lennon, were frequent guests at this “den of debauchery.”

Former Beatle John Lennon is, to be sure, one of the most famous names to be found on the Laurel Canyon Death List. Lennon also has the distinction of being one of the few Laurel Canyon alumni whose cause of death is acknowledged to have been homicide. The ex-Beatle, of course, never lived in the canyon, but he was a fixture on the Sunset Strip and at various Laurel Canyon hangouts, frequently in the company of Harry Nilsson.

Lennon was, as is fairly well known, murdered on December 8, 1980, in front of New York’s Dakota Apartments, which had been portrayed by filmmaker Roman Polanski in his film *Rosemary’s Baby* as a den of Satanic cult activity. Not long before Lennon’s murder, assassin Mark David Chapman had approached occult filmmaker Kenneth Anger and offered him a gift of live bullets. Just days after Lennon was felled, Anger’s long-delayed final cut of *Lucifer Rising* made its New York debut, very near the bloodstained grounds of the Dakota Apartments.

Precisely three weeks after Lennon’s death, Tim Hardin—Canyonite, folk musician, close associate of Frank Zappa, onetime tenant in Lenny Bruce’s Laurel Canyon-adjacent home, and former United States Marine—died of a reported heroin and morphine overdose in Los Angeles. At the time of his death, on December 29, 1980, Hardin was just thirty-nine years old, one year younger than Lennon.

Eight years later, on July 18, 1988, singer/songwriter/keyboardist Christa Paffgen, better known as Nico, died of a reported cerebral hemorrhage in Ibiza, Spain, under unusual circumstances. After achieving some level of fame as a vocalist with the Velvet Underground, Nico had left the Warhol stable and migrated west to Laurel Canyon, where

DAVID MCGOWAN

she formed a bond with a then-unknown singer-songwriter named Jackson Browne, who contributed a few songs to Nico's 1967 debut album, *Chelsea Girl*. The title was derived from New York's Chelsea Hotel, where Devon Wilson took a dive and where the persona of John Train murdered the persona of Phil Ochs.